



Department  
for Education

# **Post-16 level 2 and below study and qualifications in England**

**A Government call for evidence**

<b>Launch date</b>	<b>10 November 2020</b>
<b>Respond by</b>	<b>31 January 2021</b>

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## Foreword by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills and Apprenticeships

Many students today benefit from the further education system and go on to achieve their potential, but we know that some are left behind and let down because they don't gain the skills they need to succeed in their career. This has to change. Our vision is to level up opportunities across the country. We can achieve this by creating a system in which career progression routes are easy to identify and lead to high quality jobs, and where students develop skills that employers understand and value by aligning technical education to employer-led standards.



We are already making good progress in ensuring students can access the world-class further education they deserve. We continue to develop and roll-out T Levels, high quality apprenticeships and reformed higher technical qualifications, and we have recently put forward proposals for reforming level 3 qualifications. This will streamline the thousands of qualifications available and make sure that all choices available to students are good ones.

Alongside these proposals we are also reviewing post-16 level 2 and below classroom-based study. This is a key part of our further education landscape that is too often undervalued and its importance should not be ignored. It supports a large number of young people and adults to access higher levels of study, unlock employment opportunities, prepare for adulthood or re-engage in education, and secure English, maths and digital skills. However, too many study programmes and qualifications at level 2 and below do not have clear progression routes to further education or employment. They are not allowing the diverse range of students they serve, including some of the most vulnerable or those with special educational needs, learning difficulties or disabilities, to fulfil their potential.

Our ambition for level 2 and below study is high. We want to give students and employers the confidence that every programme or qualification at level 2 and below is high quality. We will do this by putting students and employers at the heart of our reforms, so that classroom-based study is always valuable and has clear lines of sight to level 3 study, apprenticeships, traineeships, supported internships or employment.

This call for evidence is an important stepping stone in making our vision a reality. We want to gather information about what works and hear your perspectives and experience. Together we can build a system that truly supports everyone to achieve their potential and make a valuable contribution to society and the economy.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gillian', with a large, stylized flourish above it.

**Gillian Keegan MP**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Skills and Apprenticeships

## Introduction

The Department for Education (the Department) is seeking views on study and qualifications at level 2 and below for students aged 16 and above. This is part of the review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England (the review).

## Who this is for

All parties with an interest in post-16 education and training at level 2 and below for young people and adults in England are encouraged to submit evidence. Responses are particularly welcome from education and training providers, employers, professional representative bodies, awarding organisations, parents and carers, equality organisations, devolved administrations, combined authorities, academic and educational professionals, and prison governors.

Alongside the call for evidence we will seek students' views on level 2 and below study, and work with them as we develop our proposals further.

## Issue date

The call for evidence was issued on Tuesday 10 November 2020.

## Enquiries

If your enquiry relates to the policy content of the call for evidence you can contact [Post16level3andbelowreview.CFE@education.gov.uk](mailto:Post16level3andbelowreview.CFE@education.gov.uk)

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the call for evidence process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: [Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk](mailto:Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk) or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

## The response

The call for evidence closes at 23:45 on 31 January 2021. The results of the call for evidence and the Department's response will be published on GOV.UK later in 2021.

## Confidentiality of your responses

Information provided in response to this call for evidence, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 or the Environmental Information

Regulations 2004. If you want all, or any part, of a response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department for Education will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and your personal information will only be used for the purposes of this call for evidence. Your information will not be shared with third parties unless the law allows it. You can read more about what the DfE does when we ask for and hold your personal information in our personal information charter.

## **Respond online**

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [www.education.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations) to submit your response.

## **Other ways to respond**

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, please email [Post16level3andbelowreview.CFE@education.gov.uk](mailto:Post16level3andbelowreview.CFE@education.gov.uk) requesting a word document version, which you can complete and return by email, or by post to Post-16 Qualifications Review Team, Department for Education, 2 St Pauls Place, 125 Norfolk Street, Sheffield, S1 2JF.

## **Deadline**

The call for evidence closes on 31 January 2021.

## About this call for evidence

1. This section sets out the purpose of the call for evidence and gives some background information about post-16 study at level 2 and below.

### Purpose

2. The Department is reviewing post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below, to ensure that every qualification approved for public funding is necessary and has a distinct purpose, is high quality and supports progression to positive outcomes.
3. Last year we started the review with a first stage of consultation on the overarching principles that should guide our thinking<sup>1</sup>. Our response to this and our second stage of consultation on level 3 were launched on 23 October 2020<sup>2</sup>.
4. Alongside our proposals for level 3 qualifications, we want to improve study at level 2 and below. Everyone studying at level 2 and below deserves to benefit from high quality provision that helps them realise their talents and achieve their career ambitions. Alongside the call for evidence, we will be seeking students' views directly, to make sure they are at the heart of our reforms.
5. It was clear from responses to the first stage consultation that we need to consider broader study<sup>3</sup> as well as the qualifications at these levels, and this is particularly relevant for 16 to 19 year olds. That is why this call for evidence covers issues relating to both.
6. We want students who start post-16 study at entry level, level 1 or level 2 to follow coherent pathways to good outcomes. A clearer qualifications landscape is crucial, but we know there is more to do. We must consider how to ensure programmes are engaging, support students to overcome wider barriers or prepare for adulthood, and are designed in a way that links to the intended destination.
7. Getting level 2 and below right is key to making sure that students have clear lines of sight to level 3 study, apprenticeships, traineeships, supported internships<sup>4</sup>, and for some, directly into employment. We want our further education system to be much

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<sup>1</sup> DfE (2019), ['Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England'](#).

<sup>2</sup> DfE (2020), ['Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3: second stage'](#).

<sup>3</sup> For 16 to 19 year olds, broader study refers to study programmes, which typically combine qualifications and other activities, and are tailored to each student's prior attainment and career goals. See DfE (2020) ['16 to 19 study programmes: guidance'](#). For adults, broader study refers to non-regulated learning, which can include community learning courses and independent living skills.

<sup>4</sup> A supported internship is one type of study programme specifically aimed at those aged 16 to 24 who have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or an education, health and care (EHC) plan, who want to move into employment and need extra support to do so.

clearer about who and what classroom-based study<sup>5</sup> at level 2 and below is for. All programmes and qualifications at these levels should have a clear purpose, target cohort and progression route. Before we set out detailed proposals in this area, we want to know more about what is working and what more level 2 and below classroom-based study needs to do to support all students. That is why we have launched this call for evidence in parallel with the level 3 consultation, so that we can explore these issues in more detail and in the context of the proposed reforms to level 3.

8. This call for evidence brings together the range of issues we want to explore at level 2 and below. In some cases, we propose solutions and seek specific views on these. In others, we are more explorative and invite further views and evidence from the sector. In summary:

## Level 2 (chapter 1)

### For 16 to 19 year olds

- We believe that level 2 study should be better at supporting students to access and achieve level 3. We are phasing in the T Level Transition Programme (from September 2020) for students who have the potential to progress onto a T Level following a tailored preparatory programme. This call for evidence explores whether we should introduce another transition programme designed to support progression to level 3 for students who are not progressing to T Levels.

### For all age groups post-16

- We want to improve outcomes for all students who are using classroom-based level 2 study to **enter into employment**. This might be students whose highest educational achievement by age 19 is level 2, or adults seeking employment at level 2.
- We think potential solutions might include being more prescriptive about the pathways that lead to level 2 employment and aligning classroom-based study with employer-led standards. These standards are developed by employers and approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical

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<sup>5</sup> Classroom-based study refers to all provision that is not apprenticeships, traineeships or other work-based study. Training could be delivered in a classroom-based setting through a mixture of activities e.g. in the classroom, workshops, simulated working environments and if appropriate online or in supervised working environments.

Education (the Institute) and form the basis of apprenticeships and T Levels<sup>6</sup>. To develop our proposals further, we wish to explore:

- The employment opportunities available for students at level 2 (we ask employers for evidence of these);
- What this form of study might look like, and how distinct it should be from provision designed to support progression to further study;
- Whether classroom-based study should be designed to lead directly into employment via an apprenticeship or other job role (employment outcomes tend to be better for those entering via an apprenticeship).

### For adults<sup>7</sup>

- We want to know more about the circumstances in which adults already in employment use level 2 for the purpose of upskilling.

## Level 1 and entry level (chapter 2)

### For 16 to 19 year olds

- We want to understand the differences between entry level and level 1 students and the study programmes that best support them<sup>8</sup>.
- We want level 1 study to be more effective at supporting students to progress to further study (including apprenticeships, traineeships or supported internships). We want to streamline qualifications at these levels, but we also know that the wider study programme is key to engaging these students and supporting them to progress. We are seeking evidence on effective study programmes at level 1 and will consider how we can best support providers to deliver them.
- We ask providers how they define good outcomes for students at entry level to help us determine the programmes and qualifications they need.

### For adults

- Alongside English, maths and digital skills, the level 1 and entry level provision for adults tends to cover skills for employment or living

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<sup>6</sup> Employer-led standards set out the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for an occupation. For further information, see The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education '[Occupational Maps](#)'.

<sup>7</sup> DfE (2020), '[Qualifications at Level 3 and below: contextual information on enrolments and students](#)' shows that of all the adult enrolments on level 3 and below qualifications, 87% are at level 2 and below.

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 7. In 2019, 62% of level 1 or entry level students aged 16 had not achieved at least a level 2 by age 19.



independently, as well as introductory vocational training. We are interested in hearing how providers deliver this most effectively, including whether it is through qualifications or non-regulated learning<sup>9</sup>, so that we can better understand where qualifications are necessary and add value.

### English (including ESOL<sup>10</sup>) and maths (chapter 3)

- We want to understand the circumstances in which students might need English and maths qualifications other than GCSEs and Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs). We are looking to understand who the current English, maths and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) qualifications serve and how they can be better targeted towards progression and employment.

### Digital (chapter 3)

- We propose removing public funding from level 2 ICT<sup>11</sup> FSQs and level 2 IT for User qualifications. Following our essential digital skills reforms at level 1 and the introduction of up-to-date and relevant qualifications supported by employers, we consider level 1 to be sufficient in providing the essential digital skills needed to operate effectively in the workplace and everyday life<sup>12</sup>.
9. Your responses and evidence will inform our approach to reforming level 2 and below study and qualifications, and we will set out further proposals in 2021. Where these proposals relate to the withdrawal of public funding from qualifications, they will be subject to consultation. This is with the exception of our proposal to remove public funding from level 2 ICT FSQ and level 2 IT for User qualifications. We will make our final decision based on responses to question 31 in this call for evidence.
10. You are welcome to answer all questions, or just those most relevant to you. For employers and industry representatives, questions 9 to 11, 14 to 15, 23 and 29 to 30 are most relevant.
11. Through your answers and the evidence provided, we welcome any specific information relating to how level 2 and below provision best meets the needs of 16 to

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<sup>9</sup> Non-regulated learning is learning that is not subject to awarding organisation external accreditation in the form of a regulated qualification.

<sup>10</sup> ESOL stands for English for speakers of other languages. They are qualifications aimed at non-native English speakers and teach communication skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening. The qualifications help students gain English literacy for use in education, employment and everyday life.

<sup>11</sup> ICT stands for Information and Communication Technology.

<sup>12</sup> DfE (2019), [Improving adult basic digital skills: government consultation response](#) set out that many skills classified at level 2 should be re-classified as level 1 or below.

19 year old students with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)<sup>13</sup> or adults with learning difficulties or disabilities, who are overrepresented at level 2 and below. Our final question (question 32) invites any further considerations about what the future system should retain or change for these students.

## Background and context

### **Our reforms will build on the findings of previous programmes and reviews, which have looked at different parts of level 2 and below study**

12. Reform to qualifications at these levels has focused on GCSEs, FSQs and new digital qualifications. However, some broader parts of level 2 and below study have been the subject of several programmes and reviews.
13. The Foundation Learning Tier, implemented in 2009, aimed to increase attainment and engagement for 14 to 19 year olds predominantly studying at level 1 and entry level. Students were given 'personalised learning pathways' to work towards their intended destinations. The Wolf Review (2011)<sup>14</sup> found it to be too rigidly structured and qualification-driven, incentivising providers to deliver as many formal certificates as possible and prioritise easier options over more challenging ones<sup>15</sup>.
14. The Department then looked to address those incentives through reforms to further education funding and performance tables for 16 to 19 year olds. Following the Wolf Review and a public consultation, funding changed from a per qualification basis to a per student basis for 16 to 19 year olds to encourage the development of study programmes covering work experience and English and maths alongside qualifications<sup>16</sup>. From 2016, the Department required level 2 and level 3 qualifications to meet certain criteria in order to be counted in performance tables<sup>17</sup>. However, many of the qualifications taught in further education are not counted in performance tables so are not subject to these quality criteria – only 31% of 16 to 19 year old enrolments<sup>18</sup> at level 2 and below are on qualifications included in performance tables<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Or up to age 25 for students with an EHC plan.

<sup>14</sup> Wolf (2011), '[Review of Vocational Education](#)'.

<sup>15</sup> DfE (2011), '[Foundation Learning National Evaluation](#)'.

<sup>16</sup> Wolf (2011), '[Review of Vocational Education](#)'; DfE (2020) '[16 to 19 study programmes: guidance](#)'.

<sup>17</sup> DfE (2020), '[School and college performance measures](#)'.

<sup>18</sup> It is important to note the difference between enrolments and students in the data. Where we use 'students' it refers to individuals, and they are only counted once. Where we refer to 'enrolments', we refer to each time a qualification is taken, and students can appear multiple times.

<sup>19</sup> DfE (2020), '[Qualifications at Level 3 and below: contextual information on enrolments and students](#)'. A significant number of these enrolments are on GCSEs, which are on key stage 4 (not 16 to 19) performance tables. Only 1% of 16 to 19 year old enrolments are on qualifications included in 16 to 19 performance tables.

15. The Sainsbury Review (2016)<sup>20</sup> also highlighted a complex and confusing technical education system for 16 to 19 year olds comprising thousands of overlapping and poorly-understood qualifications. It recommended that, for all technical education at level 2 and above, a common framework of employer-led standards should define the content of both apprenticeships and classroom-based programmes. In this way, students and apprentices could train towards the same end point (occupational competence) through either pathway and employers could have confidence in the quality and relevance of qualifications.
16. The Whitehead Review (2013)<sup>21</sup> and the Augar Review of Post-18 Education and Funding (2019)<sup>22</sup> identified similar concerns in level 2 and below study for adults. The Whitehead Review found that a complex further education system meant that technical qualifications used by adults held limited value and signalled few marketable skills to employers. The Augar Review suggested that the funding system was incentivising take up of lower level qualifications, rather than stretching adults to higher levels.
17. At key stage 4, the Department is introducing a revised approval process for qualifications to be included on performance tables. Level 1 and level 2 technical qualifications will have to be reviewed by the Department and Ofqual against new requirements before the Department will approve any qualifications for inclusion on performance tables.

**There are around 8,000 level 2 and below qualifications across a wide range of subject sector areas<sup>23</sup>, but many have low or no demand**

18. Level 2 and below consists of level 2, level 1 and entry level (entry level qualifications are divided into entry level 1, 2 and 3). FSQs and GCSEs – both out of scope of the review – represent a small number of qualifications at level 2 and below (2% each). However, they account for 32% and 15% respectively of all post-16 level 2 and below enrolments<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Sainsbury and others (2016), '[Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education](#)'.

<sup>21</sup> Whitehead and others (2013), '[Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications in England](#)'.

<sup>22</sup> Augar and others (2019), '[Independent Panel Report to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding](#)'.

<sup>23</sup> DfE (2020), '[Qualifications at Level 3 and below: contextual information on enrolments and students](#)'; ESFA list of qualifications approved for funding, as of May 2019.

<sup>24</sup> See footnote 23.

**Figure 1: Study at level 2 and below by qualification type<sup>25</sup>**

	<b>Number of qualifications</b>	<b>16 to 19 enrolments</b>	<b>Adult enrolments</b>
Level 2 and below	7,940	1,366,100	1,821,200
...of which are included in 16 to 19 performance tables	100	18,700	10,300
...of which are GCSEs	140	407,800	59,900
...of which are Functional Skills qualifications	150	343,800	679,200
...of which are ESOL qualifications	190	21,400	159,900

19. At level 2, qualifications are most common in health and social care and building and construction, whereas at level 1 and entry level, qualifications in ‘Foundations for learning and life’ are most common. This category includes qualifications designed to give broader personal, social or employability skills, but also includes English and maths qualifications<sup>26</sup>.

20. Almost half (46%) of level 2 and below qualifications persistently have very low or no enrolments, indicating little demand<sup>27</sup>. They are therefore in scope to have their approval for public funding withdrawn as part of our early progress on the review<sup>28</sup>.

**The review is an opportunity to ensure better outcomes for students with SEN or learning difficulties or disabilities and from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are overrepresented at level 2 and below**

21. Students need to be at the centre of our reform approach, and that means ensuring the programmes and qualifications are designed in a way that supports their decision making, engages them and addresses other barriers they may face.

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<sup>25</sup> This relates to publicly funded enrolments. All data is from May 2019, except the number of qualifications on the 16 to 19 performance tables, which is from the 2022 performance tables. GCSEs, FS and ESOL qualifications are not included in 16 to 19 performance tables.

<sup>26</sup> ESFA list of qualifications approved for funding, as of May 2019. The data excludes GCSEs and FSQs.

<sup>27</sup> DfE (2020), [‘Withdrawal of funding approval from qualifications with low and no publicly funded enrolments’](#); ESFA list of qualifications approved for funding, as of May 2019. The data excludes GCSEs and FSQs.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 27. Qualifications with no enrolments are due to have public funding removed from 31 July 2021. The next cycle of review for qualifications with low and no publicly funded enrolments will be launched this winter.

22. 22% of 16 to 19 year old enrolments at level 2, 33% at level 1 and 38% at entry level are from students who receive SEN support or have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. This compares to 6% of enrolments at level 3<sup>29</sup>. Disadvantaged students are overrepresented at level 2 and below. 30% of 16 to 19 year old enrolments at level 2, 36% at level 1 and 40% at entry level represent students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. This compares to 17% at level 3<sup>30</sup>.

23. Adults studying at level 2 and below are more likely to have learning difficulties or disabilities than those at level 3 (15% of adult enrolments at level 2, 23% at level 1, and 20% at entry level, compared to 12% at level 3)<sup>31</sup>. They are also more likely to be from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, representing 20% of level 2 enrolments, 30% at level 1, and 53% at entry level, compared to 15% at level 3<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> DfE (2020), ['Qualifications at Level 3 and below: contextual information on enrolments and students'](#). Of all 16 to 19 year old enrolments at level 3 and below, 13% received SEN support or had an EHC plan at age 15.

<sup>30</sup> See footnote 29. Of all 16 to 19 enrolments at level 3 and below, 22% represent students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

<sup>31</sup> See footnote 29. Of all adult enrolments at level 3 and below, 17% have learning difficulties or disabilities.

<sup>32</sup> See footnote 29. Of all adult enrolments at level 3 and below, 27% are from BAME backgrounds. We see the opposite trend for 16 to 19 year olds, where the proportion of enrolments from BAME backgrounds is higher at level 3 than at level 2 and below. However, it should be noted there is a significant proportion of 16 to 19 year old enrolments at entry level, and to a lesser extent level 1, for which their background ethnicity is unknown.

## Chapter 1: Level 2

24. This chapter asks how classroom-based level 2 study can best support students to access and achieve level 3 (both academic and technical); or enter into employment at level 2. The chapter covers 16 to 19 year olds and adults.
25. We want to support as many students as possible to achieve level 3. That is because we know that reaching higher levels of education is associated with higher earnings and better employment chances. Students who have achieved full level 3 by age 22 generally earn more by age 26 than those who have achieved full level 2<sup>33</sup>.
26. But we also know that some students will need to leave or pause study at level 2, and we want to improve their outcomes. Where level 2 classroom-based study leads to employment, it should deliver the knowledge and skills employers need in the labour market. This chapter explores how we can do this by learning from apprenticeships, which deliver high levels of progression into sustained positive destinations (employment, further study, or both), provide good wage returns for individuals and are particularly valuable for the most disadvantaged students<sup>34</sup>.
27. For 16 to 19 year olds, the review is an opportunity to identify clear pathways for students who start post-16 study at level 2, and help reduce churn and drop out<sup>35</sup>. Currently, 40% of 16 year olds studying classroom-based level 2 progress to level 3 the following year (37% to classroom-based study and 3% to apprenticeships). A similar proportion continue to study at level 2 (32% in level 2 classroom-based study and 7% on a level 2 apprenticeship); 5% drop down to level 1 or below and 16% leave education altogether after one year<sup>36</sup>.
28. We are exploring two 'types' of classroom-based level 2 study alongside the T Level Transition Programme: a potential new transition programme to support students to other level 3 outcomes; and pathways leading directly to level 2 employment.

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<sup>33</sup> CVER (2017), [‘The earnings differentials associated with vocational education and training using the Longitudinal Education Outcomes data’](#). Full level 3 refers to two A Levels, or other equivalent regulated level 3 qualifications, including Tech Levels. Full level 2 refers to five GCSEs at a grade C/4 or higher, or equivalent regulated level 2 qualifications, such as Technical Certificates. Further information regarding what contributes towards a full level 2 or 3 qualifications can be found [here](#).

<sup>34</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2020), [‘Apprenticeships and Social Mobility’](#).

<sup>35</sup> Churn is defined as studying at the same level for three years, switching between academic and vocational study, or dropping to study at lower levels. At level 2, churn is 19% compared to 23% at level 3. For further information please see DfE (2019), [‘Students and qualifications at level 3 and below in England’](#). Drop out here is defined as students who are not recorded in public funded education or training after the first year of further education, aged 17. At level 2, it is 16%. See DfE (2020) [‘Qualifications at Level 3 and below, contextual information on enrolments and students’](#).

<sup>36</sup> DfE (2020), [‘Qualifications at Level 3 and below: contextual information on enrolments and students’](#).

Figures 2 and 3 (pages 21 and 22) illustrate current and potential future progression routes for students studying classroom-based level 2 at age 16.

**To develop this further, we need to consider:**

- The components of each programme, and how the programmes would differ from one another. A programme supporting progression to academic level 3 might differ to one supporting progression to technical level 3, and both might differ from a programme leading to level 2 employment.
- The sectors they would serve. We think qualifications with the aim of leading to employment at level 2 should only attract public funding if there are clear labour market opportunities and occupations at that level<sup>37</sup>.
- How these different programmes can work alongside one another in practice, and where there might be barriers to providers, such as viability.

29. For adults, the future level 2 landscape will also include pathways leading to level 2 employment. These might need to be designed flexibly in a way that meets adults' needs and experience<sup>38</sup>. We also want adults to be able to progress to further study and higher level skills, and this call for evidence asks whether level 2 study needs to play a distinct role to support them to do that.

## **Questions 6 to 8<sup>39</sup>: Making level 2 programmes more effective at supporting 16 to 19 year olds to progress to level 3**

30. We want as many students as possible to be on a clearly defined route to level 3 as we know that those who achieve full level 3 will, on average, benefit from a 9% wage premium<sup>40</sup>.

31. We are consulting separately on proposals to reform level 3 qualifications that sit alongside T Levels and A levels<sup>41</sup>. Our aim is for a higher quality and more streamlined set of options for students, with clearer employer recognition for technical qualifications. The majority of 16 to 19 year olds will be able to achieve these level 3 programmes in two years. However, there will be some students who

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<sup>37</sup> Ofsted (2018), '[Level 2 study programmes](#)' report recommended that providers should assess whether level 2 students improve their access to employment by progressing to level 3 study programmes.

<sup>38</sup> We expand on these design principles in paragraphs 14 to 16 in the '[Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3: second stage](#)'.

<sup>39</sup> Questions 1 to 5 ask for information from respondents, such as their name and the organisation they represent.

<sup>40</sup> BEIS (2015), '[Measuring the Net Present Value of Further Education in England](#)'.

<sup>41</sup> DfE (2020), '[Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3: second stage](#)'.

face barriers which mean they are not ready to start a level 3 programme immediately. We need to ensure these students can access the right level 2 study programme to support them to address these barriers.

32. We know that 8% of 16 year olds already take three years to achieve level 3, including some who start on a level 2 programme before progressing to level 3 and others who switch between level 3 programmes. However, of those students who study level 2 at age 16 before progressing to level 3 the following year, over 25% do not achieve level 3 within three years of post-16 study<sup>42</sup>. We want there to be clearer progression routes for students, with programmes drawing on existing good practice, so that more students can achieve level 3.
33. We have already introduced the T Level Transition Programme, a new type of study programme for 16 to 19 year old students who have the potential to progress onto a T Level following a tailored preparatory year. It is being introduced through phased implementation from September 2020 and includes five nationally set components: a diagnostic and guidance period; English and maths; work experience and preparation; introductory technical skills; pastoral support and personal development<sup>43</sup>. Providers will consider whether they should deliver the technical skills through an existing level 2 technical qualification or through non-qualification-based delivery, such as discrete modules, workshops or projects. This approach will inform the further development of this programme.
34. Respondents to the first stage consultation told us that we should introduce broader programmes intended to support more students to access and achieve level 3. We want to explore how best to support 16 to 19 year old students who cannot start on a level 3 programme immediately, but who do not plan to take a T Level. We ask whether a dedicated preparatory year of study through an additional form of transition programme would be the most appropriate way to support these students. We also seek views on whether there are alternatives to a transition year that we should consider. The cohort for any new form of transition may include those looking to progress to level 3 academic programmes; and we are also considering whether support is needed for students looking to progress to other level 3 technical qualifications.
35. We seek evidence to inform what a new transition programme might look like. The programme might share some of the same elements as the T Level Transition

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<sup>42</sup> DfE (2020), [‘Qualifications at Level 3 and below: contextual information on enrolments and students’](#).

<sup>43</sup> The Department has published a [Framework for Delivery](#) which sets out information and expectations for how the T Level Transition Programme should be delivered. The nationally-set components offer a broad foundation for T Levels whilst allowing providers the flexibility to design the most effective programmes to meet the needs of their own students. It will be rolled out on a phased basis, working with a small number of providers initially to explore different approaches to delivery and to develop good practice.



Programme, such as a focus on English and maths for students who did not attain level 2 in their GCSE English or maths at key stage 4, study skills, pastoral support and additional support for students with SEND. For students focused on progression to academic level 3, we think there may be more emphasis on aspects such as academic writing and research techniques. For students who face barriers to starting level 3 study but who are not clear about whether they want to take an academic or technical route, there may also be a strong emphasis on careers advice and guidance.

36. As well as considering evidence from respondents, we will be looking at lessons learnt from the phased implementation of the T Level Transition Programme, including whether any new programme should include a qualification other than level 2 English and maths retakes where these are needed. We will also consider whether any changes to our study programme guidance and funding rules would be required to facilitate a new transition programme.

37. When answering the questions below, respondents should refer to proposals for which level 3 qualifications should exist in the future alongside A levels and T Levels<sup>44</sup>.

**Question 6: Would a new form of transition programme be the best way to support progression for 16 to 19 year olds who want to study at level 3 but are not quite ready to progress and do not plan to take a T Level? If not, please suggest an alternative approach.**

**Question 7: Do you have evidence of existing effective practice in the design of study programmes to support 16 to 19 year old students to progress to level 3? Please provide details.**

**Question 8: Which elements should be included in a new form of transition programme to address barriers to progression to level 3?**

## **Questions 9 to 13: Improving outcomes for students who enter employment following level 2 study (all age groups)**

38. This section looks at how we can improve outcomes for students *entering employment* following level 2 classroom-based study. This might be relevant for those whose highest educational outcome by age 19 is level 2, or adults who are using level 2 to enter into employment or retrain (we cover adults using level 2 to upskill in employment in the next section). We want to improve outcomes for students entering employment from level 2 classroom-based study, and increase their chances of going into related and sustainable employment.

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<sup>44</sup> DfE (2020), [‘Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3: second stage’](#)

39. There is some evidence to suggest positive outcomes for students who enter employment at level 2<sup>45</sup>. Our analysis, focused on 16 to 24 year olds, shows that the average student below level 2 increases their chances of successfully entering work by a third with a full level 2 qualification (which includes apprenticeships as well as classroom-based qualifications<sup>46</sup>).
40. However, this is not a consistent picture, particularly when we look at level 2 classroom-based technical qualifications excluding apprenticeships. Around 37% of students leaving post-16 education with a full level 2 classroom-based qualification experience a difficult transition to work, compared to 14% of students who leave with a full level 3 classroom-based qualification<sup>47</sup>. Results also vary by sector subject area (SSA). Students who leave level 2 classroom-based study with engineering or construction qualifications are more likely to successfully enter work than those leaving with a qualification in arts, media, or publishing<sup>48</sup>.
41. Students are also more likely to enter *related* employment in certain SSAs. Level 2 study in construction, business administration and law, health, retail and engineering provides clear routes into related occupations<sup>49</sup>. This analysis combines apprenticeships and technical classroom-based study, and we would like to explore in more detail where classroom-based study is most successful in supporting students to access related employment.

### Identifying level 2 employment opportunities

42. We want to work with employers to identify the employment opportunities that value level 2 skills. We would like employers to tell us the employment opportunities they recognise at level 2, additional to those included on the occupational maps<sup>50</sup>, either because apprenticeship standards have not been developed or because they do not

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<sup>45</sup> CVER (2019), '[Labour market outcomes disaggregated by subject area using the Longitudinal Education Outcomes \(LEO\) data](#)'; CVER (2017) '[The earnings differentials associated with vocational education and training using the Longitudinal Education Outcomes data](#)'; BEIS (2015) '[Measuring the Net Present Value of Further Education in England](#)'.

<sup>46</sup> DfE (2020), '[Post-16 pathways at level 3 and below](#)'. This research identifies six pathways through post-16 education at level 3 and below that fall into two broad groups: difficult transitions into work and successful transitions into work. Difficult transitions are characterised by students cycling between work, education and benefits, or spending time not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Successful transitions are characterised by students who leave education and quickly find employment that is sustained. This analysis was designed to look at the transition from education to work for young people completing post-16 education. It is not replicated for adults as it uses students' full education history, which is only complete for younger people in the Longitudinal Education Outcomes data.

<sup>47</sup> See footnote 46.

<sup>48</sup> See footnote 46.

<sup>49</sup> DfE (2020), '[Occupational pathways of technical qualifications](#)'.

<sup>50</sup> Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education '[Occupational maps](#)'.

meet the Institute's requirements. This will help build a fuller picture of level 2 employment opportunities.

### **Setting out the pathways that lead to these level 2 employment opportunities, and the role that classroom-based study plays within them**

43. Once we have a good understanding of level 2 occupations and employment opportunities, we can determine the role that classroom-based study should play in supporting students to access them. We want to explore where classroom-based study can lead directly into employment without further training, and where an apprenticeship (which includes at least 20% off-the-job-training) is more appropriate.
44. Currently, 43% of students who enter employment with a level 2 classroom-based technical qualification do so as an apprentice. Apprentices are also more likely to be in employment that relates to their previous classroom-based qualification, compared to students who move directly from classroom-based study to other job roles<sup>51</sup>. Earnings data also show greater returns on average for young people exiting with an apprenticeship than with a classroom-based qualification (21% vs 9% earnings return for men and 16% vs 11% for women)<sup>52</sup>. This might suggest that, in some sectors at least, pathways should prioritise progression to apprenticeships.
45. This approach of being more prescriptive about the classroom-based pathways that lead to level 2 employment is found in other countries. Where Denmark, France, Germany and the Netherlands have classroom-based qualifications and programmes equivalent to England's level 2, they are not available in all sectors as they are in our system. Instead, they are mapped to specific occupations<sup>53</sup>.

### **Aligning classroom-based study to employer-led standards**

46. Where we find classroom-based study can play a valuable role in supporting students to access level 2 employment, we will look to align it with employer-led standards, which form the basis of apprenticeships and T Levels.

### **Questions for employers**

**Question 9: Are there employment opportunities in your industry, additional to those on the occupational maps, for students qualified at level 2? What are they, and do they require specific level 2 qualifications?**

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<sup>51</sup> DfE (2020), [‘Occupational pathways of technical qualifications’](#).

<sup>52</sup> CVER (2019), [‘Labour market outcomes disaggregated by subject area using the Longitudinal Education Outcomes \(LEO\) data’](#).

<sup>53</sup> DfE (2020) DfE (2020), [‘International progression report: good practice in technical education’](#).

**Question 10: Alongside apprenticeships, are classroom-based alternatives at level 2 necessary in your industry?**

#### **Question for employers and providers**

**Question 11: Where level 2 classroom-based study leads to employment, our starting point is that it should be aligned with employer-led standards. What further actions can we take to ensure that, as far as possible, classroom-based qualifications hold the same value in the labour market as apprenticeships and that they work alongside each other effectively?**

#### **Questions for providers**

**Question 12: What evidence can you provide of existing effective practice in the design of level 2 classroom-based study and qualifications to support students to enter employment? Please specify if your examples support students into apprenticeships or other job roles.**

**Question 13: Where level 2 classroom-based study leads to employment, our starting point is that it should be aligned with employer-led standards. Are there any types of level 2 classroom-based study leading to employment where this would not be suitable?**

### **Questions 14 to 15: Level 2 study that supports adults in employment to upskill**

47. In addition to supporting access to employment (explored in the section above) and securing basic skills (explored in chapter 3), we are seeking views from employers and providers about the circumstances in which level 2 qualifications are used to upskill by adults who are already in employment .

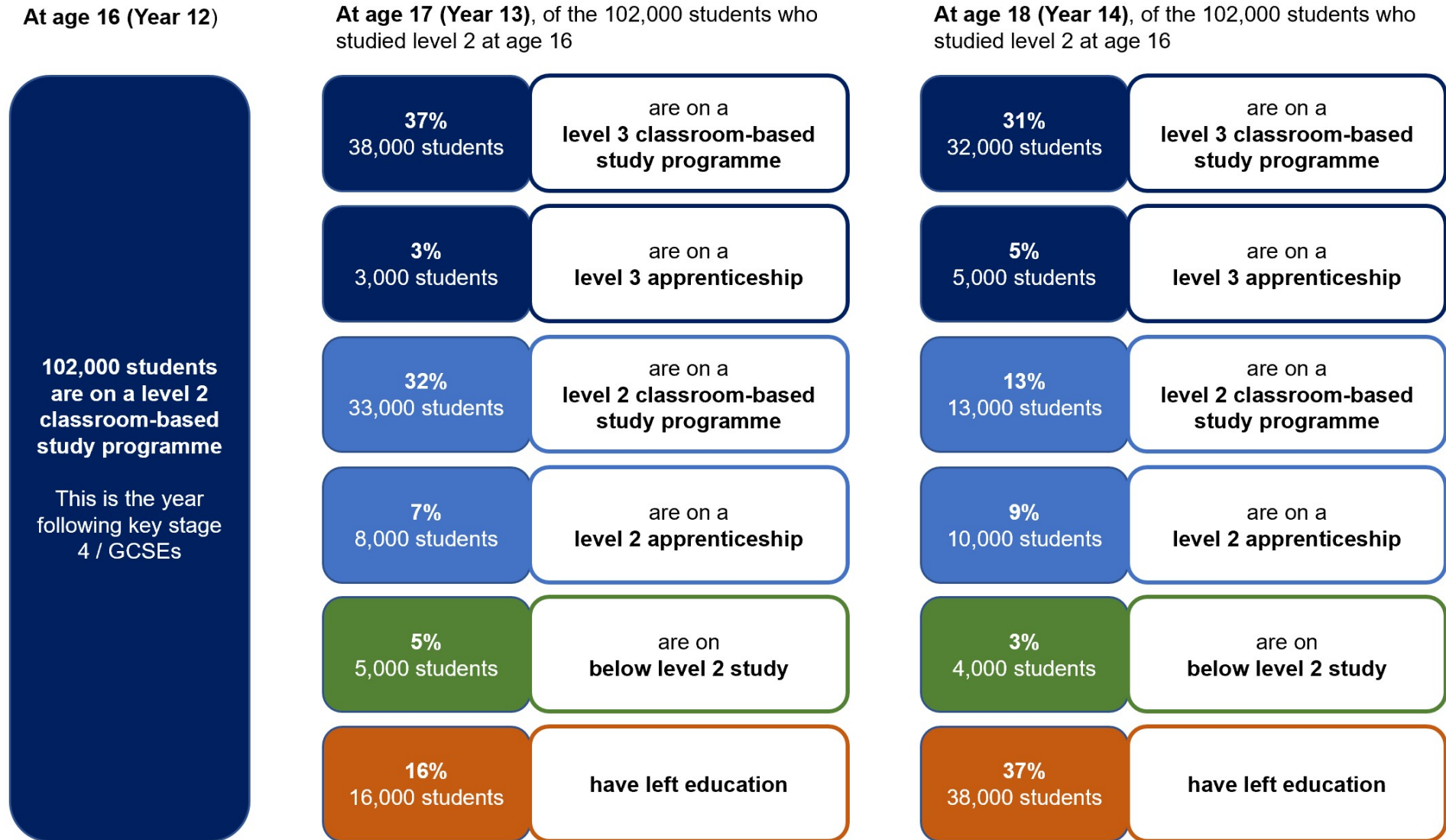
48. We want to know how level 2 study is used to upskill adults in employment, for example to recognise the knowledge, skills and behaviours they have developed in their job, or to build skills in a related area. We are interested in whether level 2 qualifications play a role here, or if another method, e.g. non-regulated learning in the form of short courses, is more effective.

49. We want adults to progress to higher levels of study if it fits their learning or career aim. We would also like to know whether level 2 study plays a role in supporting adults in employment to continue study at level 3 (or higher).

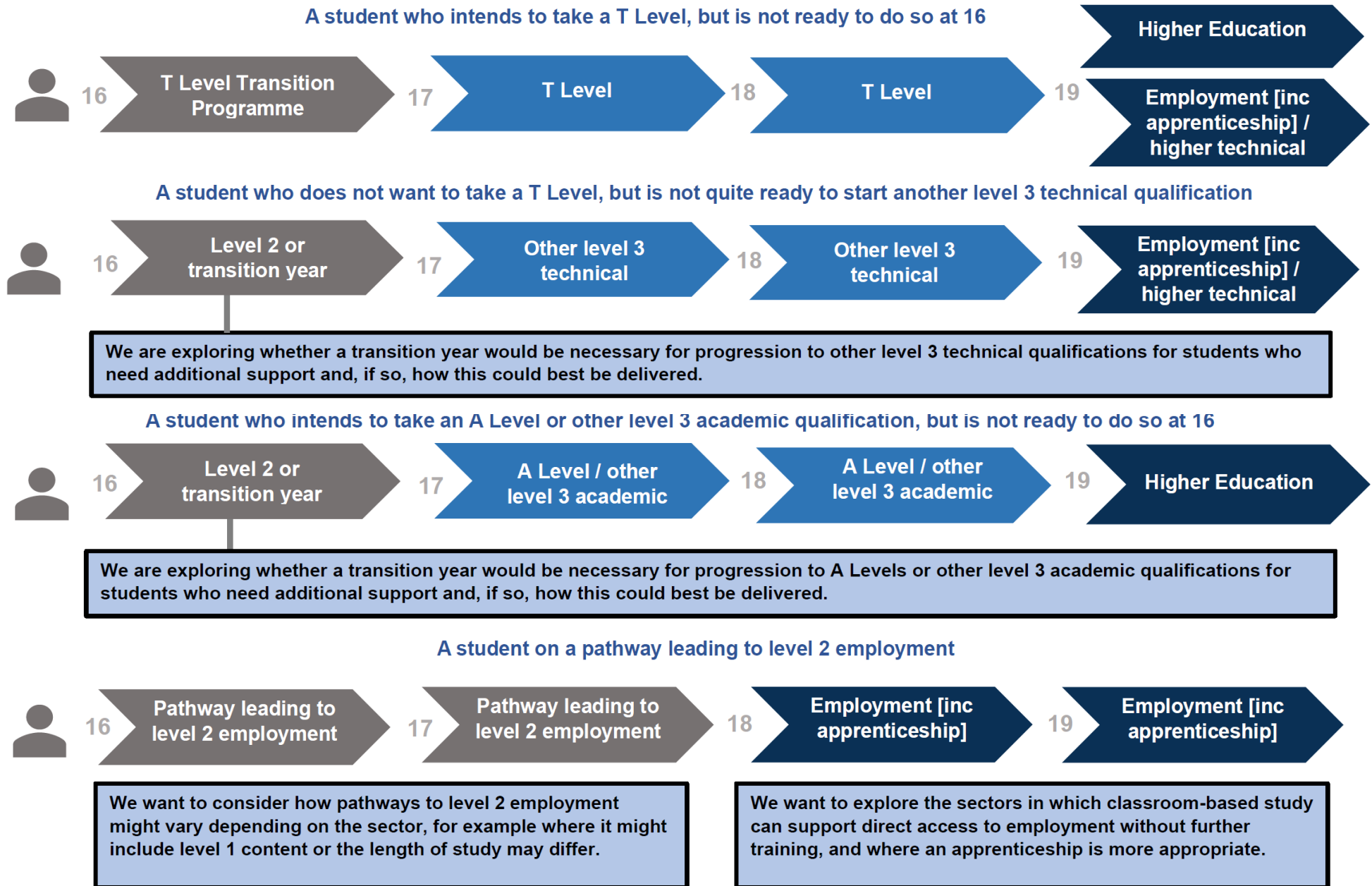
**Question 14: How useful are level 2 qualifications for the purpose of upskilling adults in employment? Please give specific examples, or indicate whether other methods are more effective.**

**Question 15: Does level 2 study play a role in supporting adults in employment to progress to level 3 qualifications?**

**Figure 2: Current level 2 pathways taken by 16 to 19 year olds**



**Figure 3: Future level 2 pathways taken by 16 to 19 year olds**



## Chapter 2: Level 1 and entry level

50. Alongside English, maths and digital skills (covered in chapter 3), level 1 and entry level study covers skills for employment or living independently, and introductory vocational training. Employability skills (mostly at level 1 and entry level but can also be found at level 2) tend to cover interview skills, building a student's self-belief in their capacity to work, networking, CV writing and effective communication. Personal, social and independent living skills (mostly at level 1 and entry level) tend to cover identifying your own strengths and weaknesses, doing domestic chores and looking after yourself and your home to help provide students with everyday skills for life.
51. Respondents to the first stage consultation told us that level 1 and entry level provision is often used to provide 'broad life skills', build confidence, and motivate and engage students to continue in further study. We know too that level 1 and entry level study might cater for a wide range of student need, experience, and motivation. This section builds on those findings, seeking evidence on how providers define good outcomes for level 1 and entry level study, and the provision that is most effective in supporting students to achieve them.

### Questions 16 to 19: Effective level 1 and entry level study for 16 to 19 year olds

52. Research and data tend to combine level 1 and entry level provision into 'level 1 and below'. It is therefore difficult to determine where there might be differences between entry level and level 1 in terms of student characteristics, good outcomes and the most important curriculum features.
53. We think the primary 'good outcome' of level 1 study is for students to go onto higher levels of classroom-based study or the work-based pathway (supported internships, traineeships or apprenticeships), yet progression rates are variable<sup>54</sup>. Nationally, 61% of those studying level 1 in their first year of further education progress to study at level 2 or above in their second year (classroom or apprenticeships<sup>55</sup>).

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<sup>54</sup> DfE (2016), ['Effective practice in supporting Entry/Level 1 students in post-16 institutions'](#).

<sup>55</sup> Of those 61%: 50% progress to level 2 classroom-based study, 2% to level 3 classroom-based study; 8% progress to a level 2 apprenticeship and 1% to a level 3 apprenticeship. A further 15% stay at level 1, 2% drop to entry level and 22% leave education. DfE (2020), ['Qualifications at Level 3 and below: contextual information on enrolments and students'](#).

54. For those who study at entry level at age 16, around 46% progress to higher levels of study the following year; 33% remain at entry level and 16% leave education<sup>56</sup>. We want to know how providers define good outcomes at entry level, and if this is defined by progression to higher levels of study, or by other markers such as developing English and maths skills, or preparing to live independently.

55. We want to streamline the complex landscape of level 1 and entry level qualifications so that every qualification has a clear purpose. But we also know that tailoring and sequencing the curriculum to fit students' individual needs is key to effective level 1 and entry level provision<sup>57</sup>. The questions below about the wider study programmes for students at this level are intended to help us determine how we can best support providers to deliver high quality study programmes. In the first stage consultation, we asked about standalone qualifications in personal, social and employability skills. There were mixed views on the value of these qualifications. We want to learn more about the different ways providers deliver these skills at level 1 and entry level, and whether this is through a qualification or through alternative methods, such as a non-regulated programme tailored to the individual student.

56. We think the key components of level 1 and entry level study programmes are:

- English, maths and digital skills;
- Introductory vocational skills and knowledge where appropriate and in line with a student's motivations;
- Information, advice and guidance (IAG);
- Work experience;
- Personal and social development (e.g. communication skills); and
- Employability skills (e.g. CV writing, interview skills).

57. We also ask about the circumstances in which a student's starting point for further education might be entry level or level 1. We want to know what kind of diagnostic evaluations providers use to ensure that students are on a course that provides appropriate stretch and challenge. This will help us consider how we can create clearer pathways for level 1 and entry level students.

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<sup>56</sup> DfE (2020), ['Qualifications at Level 3 and below: contextual information on enrolments and students'](#). 4% of entry level students are classed as 'below level 2 other' after their first year of further education – we are unable to identify whether they were studying at level 1 or entry level.

<sup>57</sup> DfE (2016), ['Effective practice in supporting Entry/Level 1 students in post-16 institutions'](#);  
DfE (2017), ['Effective curriculum practice for below Level 2 for 16/17 year olds'](#).



**Question 16: What are the main factors providers consider when deciding whether a student should start at entry level rather than level 1?**

**Question 17: How do providers define good outcomes for 16 to 19 year olds studying at entry level? Which features are most effective in achieving these good outcomes? Please refer to the features listed in paragraph 56 in your response.**

**Question 18: What are the main factors providers consider when deciding whether a student should begin study at level 1 rather than level 2?**

**Question 19: How do providers define good outcomes for 16 to 19 year olds studying at level 1? Which features are most effective in achieving these good outcomes? Please refer to the features listed in paragraph 56 in your response.**

## **Questions 20 to 21: Level 1 and entry level study for adults**

58. Level 1 and entry skills (skills for employment or living independently, and introductory vocational training) can be delivered through qualifications or non-regulated learning (including non-regulated qualifications). Non-regulated learning does not lead to a qualification regulated by Ofqual<sup>58</sup>. It is more commonly aimed at those furthest from learning or the labour market, and for those who require more support to take part in mainstream provision, enter employment and be active within their local communities. Despite the availability of non-regulated learning, there are regulated qualifications in all of these areas. The Augar Review found that level 1 and entry level qualifications were confusing and duplicative, sometimes including awards, certificates and diplomas in the same subject at the same level, offered by the same awarding organisation<sup>59</sup>.

59. We want to be clearer about the skills for which qualifications are necessary and add value for students and employers. For students looking to gain skills for living and preparation for work, we want to understand what needs to be delivered through a qualification, or whether other methods of delivery are more effective for this type of provision, for example non-regulated community learning<sup>60</sup>.

**Question 20: How do providers deliver personal, social and employability skills to adults? Is a qualification essential for this?**

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<sup>58</sup> DfE (2020), [‘Adult education budget \(AEB\) funding rules 2020 to 2021’](#).

<sup>59</sup> Augar and others (2019), [‘Independent Panel Report to the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding’](#).

<sup>60</sup> The purpose of community learning is to develop adults’ skills, confidence, motivation and resilience in order to: progress towards formal learning or employment; improve their health and wellbeing, including mental health; and/or develop stronger communities. See ESFA (2020), [‘Adult education budget \(AEB\) funding rules 2020 to 2021’](#).

**Question 21: How do providers deliver introductory vocational level 1 and entry level skills to adults? Is a qualification essential for this?**

## **Question 22: Entry level qualifications (all age groups)**

60. At entry level, it is possible for qualifications to be categorised as entry level 1, entry level 2 or entry level 3. We seek evidence on whether this is valuable, compared to having a single 'entry level' category.

**Question 22: What are the benefits of having three sub-levels at entry level?**

## **Question 23: Personal, social and employability qualifications – a question for employers**

61. We want to know whether employers recognise qualifications in personal, social and employability skills. We are looking for specific examples of qualifications that employers have used and valued, and how they are used during recruitment.

**Question 23: When you are recruiting, do you value or recognise qualifications in employability, personal and social skills, or independent living?**

## Chapter 3: English, maths and digital at level 2 and below

62. English (including ESOL – English for speakers of other languages), maths and digital are the essential skills for work, higher level study, and for life generally. That is why, for those who need it, we fully fund adults to take English and maths qualifications up to level 2, digital qualifications up to level 1, and support 16 to 19 year olds to continue to study English and maths up to level 2<sup>61</sup>. We also support adults to secure the English language skills they need by fully or co-funding ESOL qualifications.

63. We know that there is more work to do to support more people to take English, maths and digital skills qualifications. A reformed post-16 study offer will need to make pursuing these qualifications more straightforward and engaging, taking into account the different needs of post-16 students.

64. The English, maths and digital skills qualifications in scope of this review are:

- English and maths qualifications up to level 2 – excluding Functional Skills qualifications (FSQs) and GCSEs.
- ESOL ‘skills for life’ qualifications – excluding International ESOL qualifications.
- Digital skills qualifications at level 2 only – digital skills qualifications at level 1 and below are being reformed separately.

65. In this call for evidence we aim to explore how best to deliver English (including ESOL), maths and digital provision for post-16 students. We will do this through understanding what purpose is served by the qualifications and who studies them.

### Questions 24 to 25: English and maths qualifications

66. We have reformed GCSEs and FSQs and expect these to be the English and maths qualifications of choice for the majority of students.

67. However, we acknowledge that GCSEs and FSQs may not be suitable or accessible for everyone and that many other English and maths qualifications are currently taken. We want to ensure that students who need them continue to have access to

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<sup>61</sup> Since 2014, 16 to 19 year olds have been required to study English and/or maths up to level 2 as part of their study programme where they had not secured a GCSE grade 4/C in these subjects at school. This is the English and maths Condition of Funding.

robust alternative qualifications that facilitate progression to higher levels of study and sustainable employment.

68. There is a wide range of English and maths qualifications at level 2 and below available to students who do not study FSQs and GCSEs. They include unit-based qualifications initially designed against the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), which are also known as ‘stepping stones’. Stepping stones are available to students aged 16 to 19 and adults, however it is unclear how far in practice they are facilitating progression to FSQs or GCSEs as they were initially intended. There is also a range of non-unit based qualifications in English and maths – which are not FSQs, GCSEs or stepping stones – that are predominantly available for 16 to 19 year old students. We want to understand why students would take these in place of FSQs and GCSEs so we can ensure those students are supported in future.
69. The English and maths qualifications we want to review are mostly based on, although not currently regulated against, the Adult [Literacy](#) and [Numeracy](#) Core Curricula, and the National Standards for Adult [Literacy](#) and [Numeracy](#) that were originally set in 2000/2001. We want to establish whether the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Core Curricula, and the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy are still relevant, or whether they need to be reformed or replaced.

**Question 24: Which students are GCSEs and FSQs not appropriate for, and why? What are the most effective features of alternative English and maths qualifications?**

**Question 25: Are the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy and the Adult English Literacy and Numeracy Core Curriculum still relevant for the English and maths qualifications that are available alongside GCSEs and FSQs?**

## **Questions 26 to 28: ESOL**

70. This covers all ESOL ‘skills for life’ qualifications but does not include ESOL international qualifications, which are regulated by Ofqual, but do not receive public funding. There are around 200 ‘skills for life’ ESOL qualifications, delivered by 10 awarding organisations<sup>62</sup>. They are typically divided into separate awards for speaking and listening, reading and writing, and there is a certificate at each level that covers all of these elements. These ‘skills for life’ qualifications are regulated against how they meet the requirements of the National Standards for Adult Literacy and should demonstrate a clear relationship to the adult ESOL Core Curriculum.

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<sup>62</sup> ESFA list of qualifications approved for funding, as of May 2019.

71. We want to understand how far the current ESOL qualifications meet students' needs and if they might need to be reformed. We know that there are many more enrolments on entry level ESOL qualifications compared to levels 1 or 2 ESOL qualifications. We want to understand the purpose of levels 1 and 2 ESOL qualifications and whether students can be supported by English FSQs or GCSEs instead.

72. We also want to explore how relevant the underpinning National Standards for Adult Literacy and the ESOL Core Curriculum are for ESOL qualifications and whether these should be reformed or replaced.

**Question 26: Which features of ESOL qualifications are most effective in supporting students to progress to further learning or into employment?**

**Question 27: Are ESOL qualifications at levels 1 and 2 necessary? If yes, what role do they play?**

**Question 28: Are the National Standards for Adult Literacy and ESOL Core Curriculum still relevant and useful in relation to ESOL qualifications and their teaching?**

## **Questions 29 to 30: Questions about English, maths and ESOL for employers**

73. We would like to know whether employers recognise English and maths qualifications (that are not GCSEs or FSQs) or ESOL qualifications when recruiting or promoting staff. We are looking for specific examples of qualifications that employers have used and valued, and how they are used during recruitment or promotion.

**Question 29: When you are recruiting, do you value or recognise ESOL qualifications or do you assess communication and language skills in different ways?**

**Question 30: When you are recruiting, do you value or recognise English and maths qualifications that are not FSQs or GCSEs?**

## **Question 31: Digital skills qualifications at level 2**

74. Digital skills qualifications at entry level and level 1 are not in scope of this review as they are subject to separate ongoing reforms alongside the introduction of the new

legal digital entitlement for adults with low or no digital skills<sup>63</sup>. These reforms will mean that only digital skills qualifications developed based on our new national standards for essential digital skills<sup>64</sup> will be approved for funding at level 1 and entry level. This will provide students with high quality qualifications that equip them with the full range of essential digital skills for life, work, and further study.

75. The focus of this question is on digital skills qualifications at level 2. As set out in the government's response to the adult basic digital skills consultation last year<sup>65</sup>, we consider level 1 to provide the essential digital skills needed to operate effectively in the workplace and everyday life, and think that many skills classified at level 2 should be re-classified at level 1 or entry level. This is because level 2 digital skills qualifications are based on standards from 2006 and, due to advances in digital devices and applications, many digital tasks now require fewer steps to complete and are less likely to require users to have prior knowledge<sup>66</sup>.

76. Therefore, we are proposing to remove funding approval from level 2 ICT FSQs and level 2 ICT User qualifications because, following our essential digital skills reforms, we do not consider there to be a continuing need for these qualifications. Following consideration of responses to our question below, we will announce a final decision on funding approval for these qualifications.

77. We recognise there are essential digital skills elements in level 2 ICT Practitioner qualifications. We will look to align these qualifications with our updated standards, and will communicate the process for doing this in due course.

**Question 31: Do you agree that we should remove funding approval from the level 2 ICT FSQ and level 2 ICT User qualifications?**

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<sup>63</sup> Our reforms at level 1 and below are set out in the '[Improving adult basic digital skills: government consultation response](#)' (April 2019). New entry level and level 1 essential digital skills qualifications (EDSQs) were introduced from August 2020, based on our new national standards, and are fully funded through the new digital entitlement.

<sup>64</sup> In April 2019 we published the new national standards for essential digital skills, setting out the digital skills needed for work and life. The new national standards were developed based on the [Essential Digital Skills Framework](#), which was established by leading digital businesses, including Lloyds Banking Group, Accenture, Amazon, BT, and Microsoft, and is widely supported by employers.

<sup>65</sup> DfE (2019), '[Improving adult basic digital skills: government consultation response](#)'.

<sup>66</sup> For example, tasks such as initiating a video call or taking and editing a digital image.

## Supporting students with special education needs, learning difficulties or disabilities at level 2 and below

78. The review is an opportunity to make sure that post-16 study improves outcomes for all students, whatever their needs or backgrounds. We know that this is particularly important for 16 to 19 year old students with SEND<sup>67</sup>, and adults with learning difficulties or disabilities, who are overrepresented at level 2 and below. We welcome your views on how current provision best meets the needs of these students; the circumstances in which qualifications are necessary and add value; and any existing programmes or qualifications that work well or should be improved.

**Question 32: What needs to be retained or improved in the current level 2 and below offer to ensure that providers can accommodate the needs of i) 16 to 19 year olds with SEND and ii) adults with learning difficulties or disabilities?**

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<sup>67</sup> Or up to age 25 for students with an EHC plan.



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